



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



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Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on 21 March 2007

On 21 March, the day of the “Sharpeville massacre” committed in 1960, the UN observes the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Almost 50 years later, the lessons of Sharpeville have lost none of their pertinence for worldwide action against racism, xenophobia and discrimination which are still a daily reality in many countries.

New forms of racism have taken shape in the wake of globalisation, the formation of multi-ethnic societies and the fight against terrorism affecting in particular ethnic or religious minorities, immigrants, refugees or asylum-seekers. Racist thinking also springs from anti-Semitism, Christianophobia and Islamophobia and from an interweaving of issues concerning race, ethnicity, culture and religion, which threatens to erode existing human rights values.

The EU strongly condemns all forms of racism, racial discrimination, intolerance and discrimination and urges states to adopt effective measures to combat the symptoms and causes of racism and discrimination and to effectively guarantee the freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief to all without distinction. Based on the conviction that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights explicitly prohibits discrimination based on any ground such as sex, race or colour, origin, religion or belief, or on the grounds of a person’s opinion or sexual orientation.

In 2007, which has been designated as the 'European Year of Equal Opportunities for All', a major debate will be launched in Europe on the benefits of diversity for European societies. In a parallel development, the EU Fundamental Rights Agency was established in March 2007. Building on the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, the work of the Agency will continue to cover the phenomena of racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism, the protection of rights of persons belonging to minorities, as well as gender equality, as essential elements for the protection of fundamental rights.

P R E S S

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With the aim of combating racism, xenophobia and discrimination worldwide, the EU also cooperates closely with all relevant international actors and in all relevant international fora, especially the United Nations and its special mechanisms, the Council of Europe, the OSCE, the High Commissioner for Human Rights and relevant civil society organisations.

In this context, the EU remains firmly committed to implementing the goals and objectives as defined by the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in Durban/South Africa in 2001. The EU emphasizes that the follow-up process to Durban must be agreed by consensus and pursued as a joint effort by the international community.

International human rights standards relating to non-discrimination underpin the fight against racism. The EU reiterates its call on all states that have not yet done so to sign, ratify and implement as a matter of priority the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination as the core international legal instrument in this respect.

At the European level, the Council of Europe has been engaged in combating racism for a long time. It established the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) for operative tasks including the adoption of political recommendations to the governments of the member states. Protocol 12 to the European Convention on Human Rights prohibits all forms of discrimination by acts of sovereignty. The European Court of Human Rights monitors compliance with these stipulations. Since 2006, an additional Protocol to the Convention on cybercrime has curbed the spread of racism and xenophobia through computer systems.

The EU also supports ongoing OSCE efforts to combat racism and discrimination, including the work of the three Special Representatives appointed in 2004 to promote greater tolerance and combat racism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia and discrimination in the participating States. The EU considers the implementation of recently created OSCE standards in this area to be a key activity in the fight for the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, as well as against any manifestations of hate and intolerance.

Combating racism and xenophobia remains a global challenge and requires an equally global response. The EU urges all states to take effective action at both the national and international level to this end and confirms its readiness to work together with all countries to oppose racism, xenophobia, discrimination and related forms of intolerance wherever they occur.

The Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia* and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, and the EFTA countries Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova align themselves with this declaration.

* *Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.*